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State Superintendent O'Connell and Education Secretary Thomas Announce Requirements for Local Education Agencies to Participate in Race to the Top

California Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell and Education Secretary Glen Thomas today announced the release of key elements that will be included in California's Race to the Top plan and requirements for local education agencies (LEAs) that want to participate in Race to the Top.

Under the Obama Administration's guidelines, in addition prompting legislative education reforms required for states to compete, Race to the Top calls on LEAs to voluntarily partner with the state through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to implement reforms that improve student outcomes. California's MOU was developed in accordance with recently released final Obama Administration Race to the Top guidelines.

"Race to the Top is prompting an historic undertaking with the potential to change the face of education in California," O'Connell said. "By investing in state and local systems that will accelerate and drive growth in student achievement, Race to the Top represents our state's best chance to engage in the fundamental reforms that are needed to develop our workforce and fuel future innovations. We are now asking local education agencies to collaborate with the state and with each other in unprecedented ways. It won't be easy, but by joining as a group of committed educators focused on providing the opportunity for all children to reach their full potential, we know we can win this race."

"The development of California's Race to the Top plan and MOU is an important collaborative effort that is the result of the ongoing work between education leaders across the state. It is important to note that the MOU represents just one piece of the state's application process – the California legislature must pass legislation to ensure California can be highly competitive for this funding," said Secretary Thomas. "Although

we had initially hoped to release the MOU in conjunction with the necessary legislation to make California truly competitive, we can no longer wait for the legislature to begin the important work with LEAs with the looming January 19, 2010 deadline.”

Race to the Top offers an unprecedented opportunity to strategically build upon on current education reform efforts by investing in key supports that (1) that refine California’s rigorous state standards; (2) provide new supports for teachers and principals to improve effectiveness; (3) enhance local data systems and coordinating those with state data systems; and (4) transform persistently lowest performing schools. A key element of California’s application is the explicit inclusion of LEAs that want to partner with the State. Participating LEAs will need to commit to partnering with the State in implementing each of these four key reform areas.

Participating LEAs will need to sign an MOU that is contingent upon California’s success in winning a Race to the Top grant. To participate, the MOU must be signed by the LEA superintendent. However, California’s State application has a greater chance of winning if MOUs are signed by also signed by the local school governing board president and the local teachers’ union leader, or the equivalent entities for charter schools.

An LEA may choose to draft a plan that would focus only on a select number of schools, or can draft a plan that would encompass all schools in the LEA. If California wins a Race to the Top grant, LEAs will have 90 days to revise and submit their final plans.

On July 24, 2009, President Obama and U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan announced federal eligibility and competitiveness requirements for states to compete for \$4.35 billion in Race to the Top funding, the single largest pool of discretionary funding for education reform in U.S. history. State applications for securing a portion of the \$4.35 billion education funding available nationally are due to the federal government by January 19, 2010. If highly competitive, California can secure up to \$700 million in federal Race to the Top funding for California’s schools.

“In order to win up to \$700 million in Race to the Top funds, California must prepare the most competitive application possible,” Secretary Thomas said. “The legislature must make critical changes to our state laws that affect our whole system or we will be left on the sidelines of the Race to the Top. I continue to call on the state

legislature to share our sense of urgency and pass the bold bi-partisan Race to the Top legislative package already approved by the Senate.”

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The California Department of Education is a state agency led by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell. The core purpose of CDE is to lead and support the continuous improvement of student achievement, with a specific focus on closing achievement gaps. For more information, please visit <http://www.cde.ca.gov> or by mobile device at <http://m.cde.ca.gov/>. You may also follow Superintendent O'Connell (@SSPIJack) on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/sspijack>.